

What Readers are Saying ...

On my short list of must-read authors of biblical fiction

When I read Lana Christian's debut novel, *New Star*, she joined my short list of must-read authors of biblical fiction. Her novels read like political thrillers and keep me reading way past bedtime. Her first story of political intrigue, spiritual challenges, difficult relationships, and physical dangers kept me reading and losing sleep for "just one more chapter" (when I should have been working on my own writing). *Survival Secrets*, the second novel in *The Magi's Encounters* series, is a fitting successor to the first one. As the journey continues, the grave dangers and many problems the characters face kept me reading eagerly, just like *New Star* did. With a cast of characters you're sure to care about and exotic settings based on careful research, I can heartily recommend both books to anyone who loves biblical fiction or historical fiction set in ancient times.

—Carol Ashby, author of the 14-book standalone biblical fiction series, *Light in the Empire*

Deeply satisfying; the best kind of sequel

When we read a story, especially a good one with intrigue, danger, and noble main characters, we want it to go on. We want to know what happens next. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi's journey to Bethlehem abruptly ends with them being told in a dream to go home by a different route. But we know that could not have been the end. Not with power-hungry Herod being threatened by the Magi's announcement of a new king.

Fortunately, Lana Christian, who retold their story in her excellent first book, *New Star*, has returned to continue the Magi's journey as they head off on this “different route.” Inspired by her thorough research into the history of the area at the time of Jesus’ birth, she presents a likely scenario of the spiritual and physical testing they must endure in order to make it back home. *Survival Secrets* is the best kind of sequel. It helps us to imagine “what happens next” in the lives of these brave Magi, people we care about, when an abrupt ending just doesn’t satisfy.

—Tony Perona, author of the *Nick Bertetto* mystery series;
coauthor with Liz Dombrosky, writing as Elizabeth Perona,
of the *Bucket List* mystery series

A powerful story of faith in the face of an uncertain future

Lana Christian continues the intrigue of the Wise Men as they flee the perils of King Herod after finding a child who alters their lives and changes their hearts. Akilah returns with his fellow Magi as unexpected travels teach them to deepen their faith and wrestle with an uncertain future. Another encounter with the Christ child has Akilah learning the true meaning of the Scriptures he has studied. Akilah’s cousin is on her own trajectory of faith as she encounters her late husband’s Levite friend and ponders his teachings. Will the star, the child-king, and their meaning upend Magi society forever? Creativity and history collide for a powerful sophomore novel by Christian.

—Barbara M. Britton, author of the *Tribes of Israel* series
and *Daughters of Zelophehad* series

A meticulously researched, intricate story

We really don't know much about the Magi who visited the Christ child. Scripture tells us they were supposed to report to Herod when they found the child, but "they left for their own country by another way." In this second installment of *The Magi's Encounters* series, Lana Christian has crafted a compelling fictional account of the Magi's journey home. Meticulously researched, Christian weaves an intricate tapestry that blends characters, challenges, dangers, and surprises, with godly provision. And, as the title suggests, everyone has a secret. Any fan of believable fiction will love this book.

—Stan Priebe, author of
Walk With Me Through Genesis

Another dynamic story from Lana Christian!

Survival Secrets picks up right where *New Star* leaves off, as Akilah and the rest of the Wise Men "go home a different way" after meeting Jesus. The tension builds through the entire book in a fast-paced, dangerous adventure. The Wise Men's learning and knowledge may be no match for navigating political intrigue in Parthia, dissension within the caravan, a perilous journey across uncharted wilderness, and other hardships. Can their secrets help them survive? Or will the truth of Jesus strengthen them through their trials and reconcile them with a greater goal? Readers of biblical fiction will not want to miss *The Magi's Encounters* series!

—Naomi Craig, author of the *Acts of Faith* series (part of the Early Church anthology *And Their Numbers Grew*)

BOOK TWO OF THE MAGI'S ENCOUNTERS

SURVIVAL SECRETS

LANA CHRISTIAN



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*This book is dedicated to everyone who has ever said,
“My problem is too big. The task is too hard.
I can’t see a way through this.”*

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
for wisdom and power belong to Him.*

He changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes them.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals the deep and hidden things;

*He knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with Him.*

Daniel 2:20-22 (BSB)

What's Happened So Far

(Recap of *New Star*, Book 1 of
The Magi's Encounters)

As the Parthian Empire stands on the brink of an unpopular king being replaced by a worse option, Akilah, a highly respected astronomer and priest-scholar in Magi society, has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to influence that change of power. He is offered a position in the Upper Council as a Megistane—the elite group of Magi that decide who will become king. Instead, Akilah pours his energies into studying an elusive star prophesied to herald a new king. But not just any king—a Hebrew child-king who is supposed to rule eternally. As Akilah pursues slim leads that link Hebrew prophecies with the remarkable star he's seen only once, resistance to his study builds. Although the Parthian Empire tolerates many religions, it maintains a national religion that all Magi are sworn to uphold.

People in high places are threatened by the implications of Akilah's "star study"—and take increasingly drastic measures to prevent him from finding the prophesied child-king. Eventually Akilah must rely on help from the people he wants to avoid the most—his estranged father (the Chief Megistane) and his

cousin, Farzaneh, who bears deep wounds from a fateful decision Akilah had made three decades prior.

The Wise Men embark on a perilous physical journey as well as a faith journey—making new enemies as they search for the child-king Yeshua. Although they find Him, it comes at a great price, forcing them to abandon their route to return home. Their first alternate route places them in even graver danger than before. Desperate to flee beyond Herod’s control, they head into the Wilderness of Paran. Will they survive?

Familiar Faces and a Few New Ones

Survival Secrets reprises most of the characters from *New Star*, but you'll also meet a few new characters (and one special camel) in this book. New characters appear at the end of this list, shaded in gray. Names are listed in alphabetical order, not order of appearance. Can you find similarities in the characters' names and their behaviors?

Character	Pronunciation	Meaning	Origin	Notes
Akilah	a-KEE-lah OR AK-i-lah	Wise	Arabic	Lead Wise Man His head servant: Hakeem His camel: Dain
Antipas	AN-ti-pus	Against the father; instead of the father	Greek	A son of Herod the Great
Azazel	a-ZAZ-el	Scapegoat	Hebrew	Sassanak's closest colleague In Jewish culture, Azazel was an evil spirit or fallen angel
Babayi	ba-ba-EE	Grandfather	Arabic	How children commonly address their grandfather
Burhan	BUR-han	Religion	Arabic	An Oredral; he catalogs Magi research and writings His full name, Burhan Al-din, means "proof of religion"
Fakhri	FAHK-ree	Honorary	Arabic	Alludes to his status as a Magus Honorific (like a professor emeritus)
Farzaneh	FAHR-za-NEH	Wise and intelligent	Persian	Akilah's orphaned cousin
Gadiel	GAD-ee-ul	God is my wealth	Arabic	Chief Megistane of the Upper Council and Akilah's estranged father
Hadi	HAH-dee	Leader; guider	Persian	Farzaneh's Persian mastiff, her guard dog
Hakeem	Hah-KEEM	Wise	Arabic	Akilah's head servant
Haruz	HARE-us	Earnest; zealous	Hebrew	Hesed's father, a devoted Jew
Hesed	HAH-sed	Kindness	Hebrew	Caravansary owner in Ayla
Ihsan	ih-SAHN	Perfection or excellence; benevolence; compassion	Persian	Farzaneh's second husband; embraced Judaism late in life

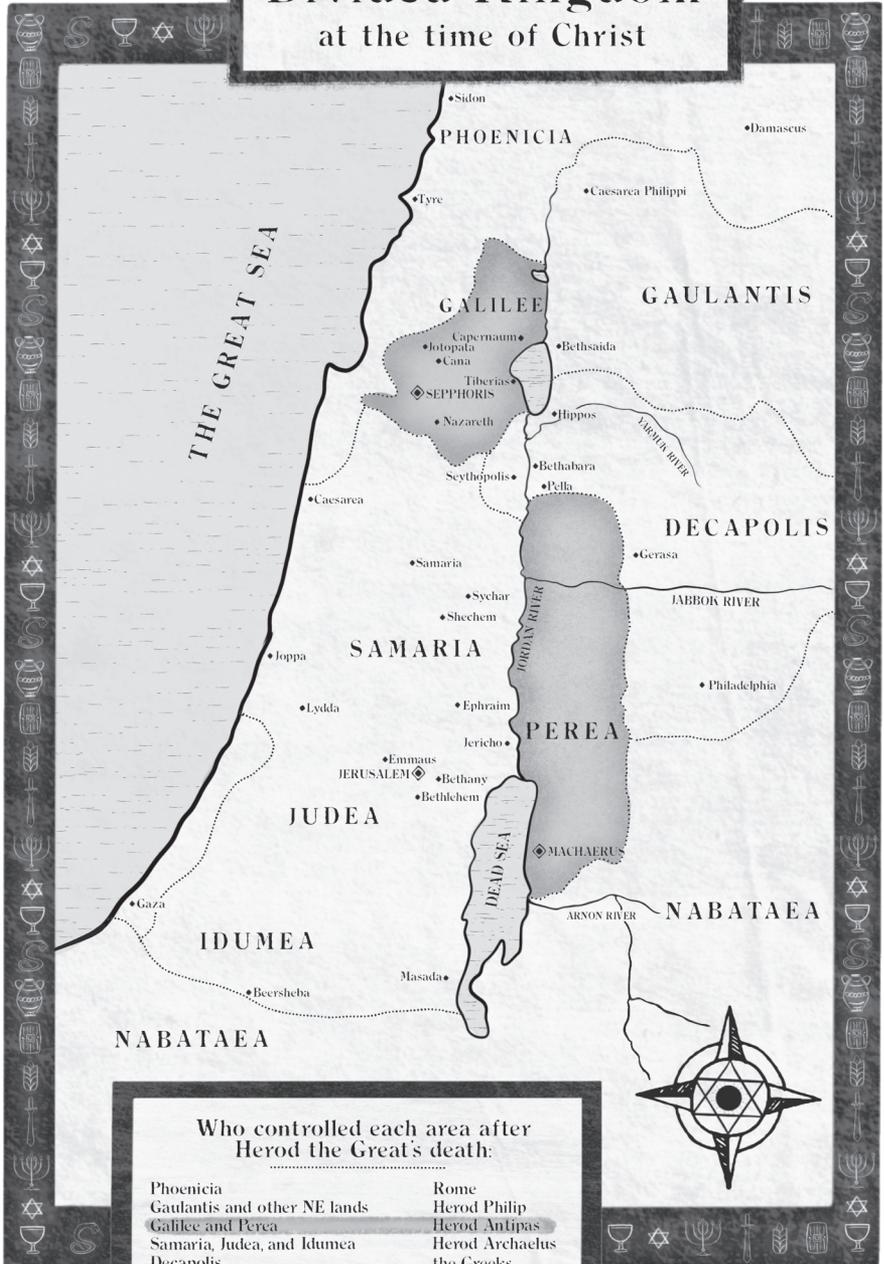
Character	Pronunciation	Meaning	Origin	Notes
Javad	jah-VUD	Righteous	Arabic	Farzaneh's head servant
Kassim	KAS-im	Divided	Arabic	Rashidi's head servant Kassim's name reflects his divided desires in this book.
Keket	kee-KET	Goddess of darkness	Egyptian	Alludes to doing dark deeds (with or without Nakal's help)
Malachi	MAL-a-kiy	My messenger	Hebrew	Tallis's head servant
Mamani	ma-man-EE	Grandmother	Arabic	How children commonly address their grandmother
Mekonnen	may-KAHN-uhn	Honorable	Ethiopian	Javad's name in the language of his homeland (Cush)
Nakal	na-KAHL	Swindler	Hebrew	A Susita merchant who takes bribes for dishonorable tasks
Omid	OH-MEED	Hope	Persian	One of Farzaneh's servants; he attempted to ford the Jordan
Rashidi	rah-SHEE-dee	Wise Rightly guide	Egyptian Arabic	Wise Man His head servant: Kassim His camel: Moody
Sadiq	suh-DEEK	Loyal; true	Arabic	Akilah's chief healer on the trip to Jerusalem
Sarbaz	SAR-bahz	Caravan leader	Arabic	A vendor and a mercenary, doing dirty work for others
Sassanak	SASS-a-NAK	(A sibilant name to reflect his character)		Head Magus of the Lower Council
Tahrea	TAR-re-uh	Anger; contention	Hebrew	One of Farzaneh's servants who causes a lot of trouble
Tallis	TA-lis	Wise	Persian	Wise Man His head servant: Malachi His camel: Tashi
Varinius	vahr-IN-ee-us	Versatile	Roman	An informant to Antipas

Character	Pronunciation	Meaning	Origin	Notes
Archaeus	ar-keh-LAY-us	Leading the people	Greek	One of Herod the Great's sons, he inherited Samaria, Judaea, and Idumea; cruel ruler; persecuted the Jews
Aretes IV	ah-REE-tuz	Virtue; excellence; moral goodness	Greek/ Nabataean	Ruler of Nabataea in its "golden age;" his daughter, Phasaelis, married Antipas
Basa	BAA-sah	A great many; too much	Urdu	Oversized, overly nosy landlord in Heliopolis
Eliana	eL-cc-AHN-ah	God has answered	Hebrew	Elyakim's wife; also, one of the first displaced people he helped
Elyakim	EI-AY-ah-KIM	God raises/establishes	Hebrew	A Levite in Arbela (capital of Adiabene)
Gushtasp	GOOSH-tahsp	Related to horses; having an alert stallion	Persian	Farzaneh's most trusted protector
Hazrat	HASS-rat	Presence	Arabic	The youngest servant in the caravan
Helena	HEH-len-ah	Shining light	Greek	Queen of Adiabene; sister and wife of King Monobaz
Ibn	EE-bun	Son of (This is a prefix, not a whole name)	Arabic	A doctor with ties to Elyakim; finds and helps people displaced, captured, or persecuted for their faith
Musa	MOO-sah	Drawn out	Possibly a variant on the Hebrew name Moshe	Italian slave girl given to Phraates IV as a gift; bore a son Phraates V, whom she manipulated to become king of Parthia; she co-reigned with him
Phasaelis	fas-AY-eh-lis	Rescue/deliver; become free	Nabataean	Daughter of King Aretas IV; promised wife of Antipas
Phillip	FILL-ip	Lover of horses	Greek	One of Herod the Great's sons; he inherited the NE lands of Herod's kingdom
Raphael	Ru-FAY-EL	God has restored	Hebrew	Eliana's son
Suhail	S00-hayl	Star	Arabic	An older camel that Farzaneh loaned to Akilah
Waqilu	Wah-KEEL-u	Steward, manager, or deputy	Nabataean	Leader of a nomadic Nabataean tribe that Akilah encounters near Egypt
Zabin	zah-BEAN	Gazelle	Nabataean	One of Waqilu's servants

Egypt's Nile Delta at the time of Christ



Herod the Great's Divided Kingdom at the time of Christ



Who controlled each area after Herod the Great's death:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Phoenicia | Rome |
| Gaulantis and other NE lands | Herod Philip |
| Galilee and Perea | Herod Antipas |
| Samaria, Judea, and Idumea | Herod Archaelus |
| Decapolis | the Greeks |
| Nabatea | King Aretas IV |

Introduction

In Hebrew culture, the concept of secrets, or hiding something, is significant in daily life and in spiritual contexts. The act can be for protection or survival, as in hiding from enemies. Something deep or hidden often connotes special knowledge that few people possess.

In the Roman and Parthian Empires, knowledge is highly valued but cloaked in superstition and secret. Most cultures believe secret knowledge comes from the gods, so extraordinary efforts are made to curry their favor to attain those secrets.

In Parthia, divine favor, or *farr*, imparts knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and even power. This is crucial for the king to have—because if he does something dreadful to lose *farr*, the entire kingdom will suffer. Mixing royal Persian with Roman blood tops that list.

As Parthia's power shifts to its young half-blood (Persian-Roman) king and his ambitious Roman mother, power in Herod's kingdom shifts to three of his sons. Archelaus's mistreatment of the Jews is so cruel that Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt. Another of Herod's sons, Antipas, plans to make his corner of the world great in a new way.

Introduction

Against that backdrop, those who believe in Messiah as the prophecies foretold are in increasing danger.

The risk and cost of knowing about Yeshua have already exacted a toll on the Wise Men. Enemies, the environment, and secrets the Wise Men harbor test their newfound faith in ways they never could have imagined. Some secrets need to be kept in order to survive. Other secrets must be revealed in order to truly live. Their tenuous chance of survival rests with the God they cannot see and know little of.

Chapter 1

The Good Lie

Somewhere in the wilderness of Paran, 3 BC

Was heading to Egypt the right choice? Akilah rimmed his soup bowl with his thumb. The Kings Highway would have taken his caravan from Jerusalem all the way back to the Euphrates River, but traveling home on any Roman road was out of the question. With mathematical precision, Roman watchtowers measured those roads. *Stationarii*, special Roman imperial troops, manned those posts, scouting for runaway slaves and other “undesirables.” Akilah and his colleagues had become undesirables the moment they decided to not return to Herod with news of the eternal child-king they had found. Herod undoubtedly had wasted no time dispatching Roman relays with orders for *stationarii* to intercept the Magi and drag them to Jerusalem in chains.

The caravan might have hazarded sea travel from Ayla if they hadn’t crossed paths with one of Herod’s scouts and some

Nabataeans there. No, heading northwest toward Egypt was their only option. Akilah had to keep his caravan safe.

Safety. What a precious commodity. Akilah shivered to think of the consequences if he failed at his task.

He sipped his bowl of watery soup. Barren ground had already replaced Ayla's lush beauty. Thankfully, today's unusually cool temperature had allowed the caravan to press on longer than usual—until grumbling stomachs forced them to stop for the day's second meal, a diluted version of the morning meal.

They wouldn't be able to cover this much ground every day. Who knew what challenges this wilderness held for them? Quelling the caravan's fear of the unknown would be an ongoing effort. Akilah had to maintain everyone's focus on covering more ground—even though he had not yet revealed to them where they were going. Heliopolis. It was a wish, a hope, a prayer—at least a month away if all went well. From Heliopolis, they could continue to Alexandria.

Egypt. True safety. Akilah couldn't muster any thought beyond that. Egypt was in the opposite direction of home but was truly out of Herod's reach. They just had to get there.

Akilah watched his head servant, Hakeem, circle the campfire. He had shouldered more responsibility than a servant should ever need to, yet he did so without complaint. Akilah repeatedly struggled to find the right words to express his appreciation. Instead, he said nothing. Silence was more comfortable.

Hakeem bowed before his master. In this rocky wasteland, that simple sign of subservience and respect was a comforting vestige of what had been ... a life of prestige and honor in Magi society. A life Akilah might never return to.

“Master, now would be a good time to address everyone.”

Akilah nodded and rose. Stepping close to the fire, he

clapped his hands three times, his signal for the whole caravan to meet.

“We regret that urgent business took us away from lovely Ayla,” he started.

“What ‘business’ would take us into the wilderness?” one servant said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

Akilah grimaced inwardly. Tahrea. A force to reckon with. Privately. “Business that must be kept secret from certain people.”

“Why wouldn’t you tell us that ‘business’ until we were too far from Ayla to turn back on foot?” Tahrea said, his voice rising. “Now we’re your captives.”

“That’s not true.”

The servants’ unruliness rose like swells in a storm. Logic wouldn’t win them over. Something more visceral had to move them. Motioning for silence, Akilah glanced at his fellow Magi leaning against a rock beyond the caravan’s campfire circle. He was reasonably sure of Rashidi’s thoughts. Less is more. Keep the servants in their place. They’re under contract; they must fulfill their obligation, regardless. Tallis’s face was an expressionless mask.

“You have a right to know why we aren’t going home yet,” Akilah said. “It relates to why we went to Jerusalem and what happened there.”

Everyone’s eyes bored into him.

“It’s a good story,” he added. The servants liked stories. Maybe that would pique their interest. “In Persia, my colleagues and I studied a star that foretold the birth of a child who would be an eternal ruler and the Savior of the world.”

Sniggers and guffaws erupted.

“Inconceivable, yes? But Jewish prophecies over hundreds of years pointed to the birth of a unique person. Not a king born into royalty, but someone we all could relate to.”

Silence descended on the camp.

“We traveled from Persia to Jerusalem to find that child. And we did.” Akilah’s throat tightened. “But some people wanted to harm him. Especially King Herod. He has a habit of killing people when he considers them a threat to his throne. Herod commanded us to report to him when we found the child. We did not.”

Akilah shifted in place. “We could not betray the child and His family. Our disobedience to Herod made us targets of his wrath. We couldn’t go home the way we came because that’s the first place his soldiers would have looked for us.” Akilah paused to gauge the servants’ reactions. Their silence thickened like gathering fog.

“You defied a king?” One servant finally spoke—slowly, as if testing his words.

“Yes.”

“Is the child safe?”

Akilah exhaled a shaky breath. “I hope so.”

His answers seemed to fuel other servants’ courage to ask questions.

“Do you know where the child is now?”

“No.”

“Is Herod still hunting you?”

“I have every reason to believe so.”

“Why did we leave Petra? Then Ayla?”

Normally Akilah would not have entertained servants questioning him, but nothing about this trip resembled any other in his career. “Herod has family ties to Petra. We thought we were safe in Ayla, but one of Herod’s scouts found us.” Akilah swallowed hard. “With help, we escaped that trouble.”

The servants’ murmurs rose again, this time rippling with notes of awe and respect.

He gestured for quiet. “Herod’s men are one threat. Nabataeans are another. In Ayla, we learned a group of them were searching for us—perhaps to turn us over to Herod, punish

us for using some of their secret water sources, or both. We didn't know they occupied part of Ayla, plus territory hundreds of miles east of it. That's why we're heading west." He paused again. "You could say that makes us renegades on two accounts."

Akilah glanced at Rashidi, expecting a reaction. "Renegades" had become Rashidi's favorite descriptor for their situation.

"So ... you lied and stole but for good reasons?" Some servants seem to like that idea.

"I am committed to getting this caravan to safety."

"Where are we headed?"

"To Egypt."

"Egypt?" Frenzied chatter erupted. The servants' terrified, wide-eyed stares confirmed the limits of their previous travels.

Akilah called for silence. "Egypt will provide true safety for us. It's far from Herod's reach. The Nabataeans can't touch us there either. And Egypt welcomes people who believe in the prophecies we studied."

"How long?" Tahrea shouted.

Irascible voice. If Akilah could channel that servant's skill at sewing discord into a positive direction, he could be a leader someday.

"As long as needed," Akilah said.

"Then we don't know if we'll ever get home." Tahrea pounded the ground.

Akilah clenched his jaw. "We *will* go home. You have my word. This isn't the journey we planned, but its purpose is still unfolding." Hoping to divert the servants' attention, he added, "In Egypt, I promise you will see more glorious things than you could ever imagine."

The servants exploded again with chatter.

Akilah silenced them with difficulty. "Listen well. Our lives—and the lives of that child and his family—depend on your silence. *At all costs*. One person's loose tongue could endanger

Lana Christian

our caravan, the child, his family, and worse. On the other hand, your silence and faithful service in getting us to Egypt will determine the success of our journey. You could say we have sacred secrets to protect. Will you keep that charge?”

Akilah interpreted their murmurs as an affirmative.

Some servants seemed to revel in the intrigue. Others looked unconvinced.

As everyone retired for the night, Hakeem approached Akilah. “A few servants want to know more about the star and the child,” he said. “What the prophecies say and what you believe. Will you tell them?”